



the Quail

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

P.O. Box 53, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php

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December 2012 – January 2013

Madagascar ♦ Bob Lewis

Ninety million years ago, Madagascar broke away from the last fragments of Gondwana, the great southern continent. Since that time, life on Madagascar has been evolving in its own unique way, isolated from Africa by 300 miles of the Mozambique channel. There are 5 or 6 families of birds found only on this fourth-largest island and over half of the world's chameleons live only here. Lemur ancestors came to Madagascar about 50 million years ago and flourished since they have little competition or predation on the island. There are about 70 species, and they exist only on Madagascar. Join Bob Lewis as he considers the evolutionary concepts of endemism and adaptive radiation on this island laboratory, and illustrates Madagascar life with striking images taken on a recent trip. Meet Cuckoo-Rollers, Asities, Mesites, Vangas and other Malagasy birds,



Malagasy Scops Owl, also known as the Rainforest Scops Owl, is primarily an insect eater. Coquerel's Sifaka lives in matriarchal groups of 3-10 individuals. It is a diurnal, arboreal lemur. Like all vangas, Sickle-billed Vangas are found only on Madagascar. Their long curved bills are useful for capturing lizards, spiders and insects that inhabit cracks in trees.

Bob Lewis photos.

and discover some of the many species of lemurs that call the Madagascar forests home. To get in the right time zone, we'll spend a few minutes in Cape Town, South Africa, chasing the elusive Cape Rockjumper before departing for our ultimate destination.

Bob Lewis received a BS in chemistry from Carnegie Institute of Technology and a Master's and PhD in organic chemistry from Princeton University. Bob is a GGAS board member and field trip leader and an award-winning nature photographer who has traveled to many countries in search of avian subjects. Bob serves on the board of the Farallon Foundation and is a coordinator of the Oakland Christmas Bird Count, in which he has been a participant for over 25 years. He has also taken part in several county breeding bird surveys, including Contra Costa. He has taught birding classes in the Bay Area for almost 20 years, and is a frequent speaker at libraries, conservation groups, photo clubs and benevolent societies on bird-related subjects.

Bob has seen about 4,000 of the world's 10,000 species of birds, and enjoys photographing members of the world's bird families

BIRDING INFORMATION

Brian Murphy will present December's Birding Information segment and tell us about Wood Ducks in our local streams: their conservation status and what we are doing to help these beautiful birds.

January Birding Information will be our annual update of the Contra Costa County and the East County Christmas Bird Counts with compilers Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern.

Meeting Schedule

The next general meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society will be **Thursday, December 6**, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, Walnut Creek.

7:00 PM Birding Information

7:25 PM Announcements

7:40 PM Refreshments,* raffle

8:05 PM Speaker: **Bob Lewis**

* Please remember to bring a cup.

Thursday, January 3:

Birding Adventures

January Meeting

The January meeting of Mount Diablo Audubon Society on **Thursday, January 3**, will highlight **Birding Adventures**.

See story on Page 3.

President's Corner

Recently I was with some friends who had moved to Oregon. I was visiting them for the first time since they moved from Orinda to Medford. They introduced me one evening to their neighbors. The introduction was what happens to me a lot with people who know I am a birder, but don't really understand why or what that means, so the introduction goes something like this. "This is our friend Jimm Edgar. He is a bird watcher; tell them how many birds you have seen." It is always a little embarrassing because the number means nothing to these people. I try to change the subject. I am sort of proud of my life list, but only to me does it mean much. On the other hand other people's number can mean a lot. A friend of mine was in London recently and brought me an article from *The Independent*. I think it is a local London newspaper. The article was about a man named Tom Gullick who had just spotted his 9000th species in Indonesia. The bird was a Wallace's Fruit Dove. Now that is a spectacular number! Can you imagine 9000 species! The article goes on to say that he "hung up his binoculars." "Enough is enough" he was quoted as saying. I wouldn't hold my breath on that remark. Birding gets under your skin and it would be tough to just quit. It sure would be for me.

Next week I am going to travel along with my wife Bettie as she works a trip to Korea. We are going to try to go to the DMZ and maybe see the endangered Red Cranes that winter there. I have been trying to make contact with somebody in Seoul to guide us. I have been using the website birdingpal.org; so

far no luck. I will let you know what happens.

This is the season for the Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. Our chapter has two counts; one in the central part of Contra Costa County and one in East County. The east count is Tuesday, December 18 and the central count is Saturday, December 22. I hope you can join us, or if you have a bird feeder let us know what you see on one of those days.

Diana Granados, our chapter secretary, gave us a heads up at the last meeting about the tremendous difficulties American Kestrels are having all over the country—mostly attributed to pesticide use. We are going to do whatever we can to try and help save these wonderful small falcons.

Our general meetings continue to be well attended. Ariana Rickard, our new program chair has lined up some great programs, and our hospitality folks continue to have great goodies. I hope to see you at a meeting soon.

This issue also has the line-up for our upcoming field trips. Hugh Harvey and his crew have put together some new spots and lots of our tried and true places to see birds. Should be fun. If you have never come with us, a special invitation for you is offered by Maury Stern and Tracy Farrington.

We have gotten quite a few new members this summer, which is great. Our membership chair, Bev Walker, receives these forms and sends a welcome letter under my name. I hope those of you who

By Jimm Edgar

Welcome New Members

Bridget Albosta	Walnut Creek
Norval Fairman	Diablo
Brian Hitchens	Concord
John Ross	Sioux City, IA

recently joined will attend our meetings and field trips and be sure to introduce yourself.

I live in Oakland as most of you know. I was a member of MDAS since the early 70s and was transferred to Oakland with my job in 1986, but kept my membership in MDAS. I am not as aware of the political scene in Contra Costa County as when I lived there. I received a phone call a while back from Congressman George Miller's office. The county has been redistricted recently and Miller's influence includes almost all of Contra Costa. The call said he would like the opportunity to meet with Mount Diablo Audubon to discuss environmental issues within the county. We are working on that with his office. It would probably have to be on a Saturday in that he is in D.C. most weeks. I will keep you abreast of that. We may try and invite some other county groups with concerns for the environment.

And finally I must put my 2 cents in on Gary Bogue. His retirement was a shock to all of us, I think. He has been and will be honored by many and rightly so. We are hoping to get him to a meeting this year to give us a chance to thank him. Thanks Gary!

Protect Wild Birds and Their Habitat

✦ Support Mount Diablo Audubon Society.

Now is an excellent time to remember Mount Diablo Audubon Society in your gift giving. Your donations are needed if we are to be successful in adhering to our mission of protecting natural habitat for birds and wildlife, and particularly in providing environmental education for our youth.

Only once each year Mount Diablo Audubon Society makes a plea for financial support. Letters have been mailed to each member family as well as to members of National Audubon living in our area. Response to this annual request provides the funds needed to accomplish programs beyond the basic operations such as meeting space rental, newsletter publication, speak-

ers' honoraria, etc. When you contribute beyond yearly membership dues you are actively taking part in our cooperation with Native Bird Connections, our partner in reaching out to school children throughout the county for conservation awareness. You are also working to re-establish habitat for waterfowl in local streams by supporting Just for Ducks. You are helping save raptors as we work to provide and install nesting boxes for Kestrels and Barn Owls.

A tip for those of you who may need to make dispersals from an IRA. Be alert to whether Congress extends the law whereby a direct donation reduces your taxable income.

Thank you for your continued support.



This small, highly streaked, gregarious bird is known for being common in some years and scarce the next.

The fall of 2012 is one of the times when there are flocks of them devouring thistle and millet at our backyard feeders.

Unscramble these letters, or turn to Page 6 to learn more.

EIIIKNNPSS

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Australia's Western Bowerbird

January's meeting will begin with a potluck dinner at our regular meeting place at The Gardens at Heather Farm. Doors open at 6:00 PM. Members bring a main dish, salad, or dessert and their own plate, utensils and coffee cup. Please mark your serving plates. Coffee, tea and punch will be provided. Bring your own wine if you wish.

Accolades and thanks are owed to our Hospitality Committee volunteers for setting the ambience.

For our main program on January 3, we will screen an episode of the TV series *Birding Adventures* hosted by James Currie. The show debuted in 2009 and in 2012 aired nationally on NBC Sports Network. It focuses on "the adventure of birding, the new smells, new bird calls, new wildlife and amazing cultures," and emphasizes the importance of bird and wildlife habitat preservation. Going against stereotype, *Birding Adventures* showcases birding as an active sport, rather than a passive one.

The featured bird in the episode we will show is the Western Bowerbird in the Northern Territory of Australia. Encompassing the Red Center, Uluru (Ayers Rock), Kakadu National Park and the "Top End", Northern Territory Australia has

some of Australia's best birding. From desert to tropical monsoon forest, Northern Territory contains over half of the continent's bird species.

The Western Bowerbird (*Chlamydera guttata*) is a common endemic of Australia. Like most bowerbirds the Western Bowerbird is polygamous, with a male mating with several females over a breeding season and the female undertaking all nesting, incubation and chick-rearing responsibilities. As is typical in the Bowerbird family, the male constructs an elaborate bower with which to attract females. Western Bowerbird bowers are paired avenues of sticks, 20–25 cm tall, and 25–35 long placed on top of a platform of sticks. The bower is decorated with green and white objects, including berries, fruits, shells, pebbles and bones. Man-made objects may also be used for decoration, including glass, gun casings and metal objects. Each bower may be used for a number of years and when new



bowers are constructed material from the older bower will be recycled. The male advertises his bower with calls. When the female arrives to inspect he will perform ritualized dances, fanning his tail, jumping and wing flicking, as well as further calling. Decorations will also be held in the bill and shaken vigorously, and the pink crest on the neck will be erected.

We will also be learning about Australian culture and watch our host and companions sample some local cuisine.



Benefit for Native Bird Connections



The rummage sale sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited on November 10 turned out to be a very successful event on a glorious fall day. The proceeds totaled over \$800, which represents a significant supplement to the ability of Native Bird Connections to care for their avian ambassadors and to continue their mission of conservation education in schools throughout the county. In attendance were both a Golden Eagle and a Bald Eagle, both to be greatly admired for their regal demeanor.

Many MDAS members were numbered as both donors and buyers, and the range of items offered for sale ranged from great bargains to rare finds.

Helping Diana Granados were the following people: Nancy and Jim Tatum, Ronda Christianson, Clarice Hernandez, Nina and Leary Wong, Christy Lundberg, Barbara Smith, Diane Vervoort. At the eagle table, Kathy Wolf, Katie Jahns, and Barbara Smith assisted handler Jenny Papka. Thanks to them all.

Soaring costs for veterinary services and medications, food (now \$40 per day!), and vastly increased state fees have made it imperative that new funding be acquired. If you can help in any way, please find out how by visiting www.nativebirds.com, and click on the "Support" tab. Thank you.



Field Trip Schedule

By Hugh Harvey

December

- 1 Saturday..... Charleston Slough/South Bay
- 8-9 Saturday-Sunday Sacramento Refuges
- 13 Thursday Niles Area
- 18 Tuesday East County Christmas Count
- 22 Saturday..... Central County Christmas Count

January

- 11 Friday Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh
- 12 Saturday..... Putah Creek
- 26 Saturday..... Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger

February

- 2 Saturday..... Thornton Area/Cosumnes Preserve
- 14 Thursday Grizzly Island Wildlife Area
- 16-17 Saturday-Sunday..... Los Banos/Panoche Valley
- 20 Wednesday Sunol Regional Park
- 23 Saturday..... Tomales Bay State Park

② Saturday, December 1 Charleston Slough/South Bay

Leader: Eugenia Larson, 806-0644.

Carpool leaves at 7:30 AM from Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride. Meet at Terminal Road in Mountain View at 8:30 AM. Take I-680, exit Mission Boulevard west. Continue through two traffic lights and take I-880 ramp south. Exit to SR 237, connect to US 101 north at Moffett Field. Exit at San Antonio Road, turn right (north) to Terminal Road, turn right and park. Entrance is on left. Other areas of interest in the South Bay are Palo Alto Baylands, Alviso and Redwood Shores. Shorebirds and waterfowl should be plentiful. Bring lunch and a beverage.



Duck Pond at Palo Alto Baylands

② Saturday-Sunday, December 8-9 Sacramento Refuges

Leader: Terry Colborn, tlcgdc@aol.com, 916-705-8991.

This weekend field trip will include visits to several wonderful wildlife refuges in the Sacramento Valley. Collectively these sanctuaries are home to tens of thousands of wintering ducks, geese and swans. Featured on this trip will be visits to Sacramento National Wildlife refuge on Saturday, followed by Colusa National Wildlife Refuge and Gray Lodge Wildlife Area on Sunday. Many other locations will be visited. This is a very popular trip, and space is limited, call the leader; carpooling is essential. This is a great trip for beginners and seasoned birders alike. There are several motels in Williams; early room reservations are recommended. Participants may opt to arrive on Friday night for the 7:00 AM start time on Saturday.

② Thursday, December 13 Niles Area

Leader: Jimm Edgar, 510-658-2330.

Carpool leaves Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride at 8:15 AM. Meet at the Vallejo Mill Park in Fremont at 9 AM. Take I-680 south to Niles Canyon exit, turn right (west), follow SR 84 about 7 miles towards the Niles District. The park is at SR 84 and Mission Blvd. We follow Alameda Creek and visit some of the old gravel pits, which have been re-landscaped as parkland.

Come birding with us!

Field trips are open to members and non-members, beginners and advanced birders, but not dogs. Weather or other contingencies may require changes. For updates, visit the MDAS website at www.diabloaudubon.com/index.php. Phone area codes are 925 unless specified otherwise. Because most trips do not return until late afternoon, bring a lunch and drink and join us during our midday break.

Category ①: Easy, little or no walking, smooth paths

Category ②: Moderate, one mile +, possibly rough terrain

Category ③: Difficult, extensive walking on rough terrain.

Our Mount Diablo Audubon Chapter is a conservation organization. As such, we encourage members to consider meeting at the carpool point to pick up or ride with others. It is important that given the cost of gasoline, those who ride with others offer to pay some of this cost. Don't forget about any bridge tolls or park entry fees on some of our longer trips. Carpool locations: **El Nido Ranch Road**—Exit SR 24 at St. Stephens Drive east of Orinda. El Nido Ranch Road is parallel to and north of the freeway. Park just east of the intersection with St. Stephens Drive. **Sun Valley**—Southwest corner of the Sun Valley Mall parking lot at Willow Pass Road and Contra Costa Boulevard in Concord. **Sycamore Valley Road Park and Ride Lot**—Just south of Danville, exit I-680 at Sycamore Valley Road to the east; the Park and Ride lot is on the left.

① Friday, January 11 Lake Merritt/Arrowhead Marsh

Leader: Sandy Ritchie, 685-8048.

Carpool leaves at 8 AM from El Nido Ranch Road. Meet at 8:30 AM in parking lot by Lake Merritt. Take SR 24 to Oakland and I-980, take Grand Avenue exit and turn left on Grand. Enter park at Children's Fairyland (entry fee), and follow road around to parking lot entrance on right between boathouse and aviary. Birding through the many ducks and gulls, we may find a Tufted Duck, a bird seen almost annually. We will then drive to Arrowhead Marsh for the high tide; the rising tide should flush out rails. The area is also good for shorebirds and often loons are on the estuary. A visit to Garretson Point will finish our trip. Bring lunch and drinks.

January Field Trips

1 Beginner's Bird Trip

Tracy Farrington and Maury Stern will lead a morning field trip to Lake Merritt, Wednesday, January 9. Limit is 12 birders, and we want people who have never been on a field trip before. Please call or e-mail to sign up.

Maury Stern 925-284-5980 mbstern2@yahoo.com

Tracy Farrington

925-946-0886 tracy_farrington@yahoo.com



Tufted Duck at Lake Merritt.
Photo courtesy of Lee Aurich
aurich.com/photos

1 Saturday, January 12 Putah Creek

Leader: Fred Safier, 937-2906.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley at 8:00 AM. Meet at 8:45 AM at the intersection of Cherry Glen and Pleasants Valley Roads, approximately 1 mile north from I-80, west of Vacaville. Park on Cherry Glen. Dress warmly; this is a cold, windy area. Bring lunch. Possible Osprey, Phainopepla, Barrow's Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser.

2 Saturday, January 26 Las Gallinas/Rush Creek/Shollenberger

Leader: Eugenia Larson, 806-0644.

Carpool leaves Sun Valley parking lot at 7:30 AM. Meet at Las Gallinas at 8:30 AM. Take I-680 across the Benicia Bridge (toll). Go west on I-780 to I-80 towards Sacramento, exit to SR 37. Follow SR 37 22 miles to US 101 south, exit at Lucas Valley Road/Smith Ranch Road. Cross under the freeway to the east on Smith Ranch Road for 0.6 miles, cross the railroad tracks and turn left. Follow the road around the hill 0.7 miles until arriving at the Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District parking lot. Rush Creek Marsh is just north and east of the Atherton Avenue exit from US 101 in Novato. Immediately past the Park and Ride lot on Atherton, turn left onto Binford Road and go north to the marsh. Shollenberger Park is in Petaluma, east of US 101. Exit at Lakeville Highway, go east to S. McDowell and turn right. Look for a half-right onto Cypress Drive, then enter the PRBO parking lot at 3820 Cypress. Go to the back and park near the picnic tables. Ellis Creek is just south of the PRBO offices. All four sites are good for wintering waders, shorebirds, waterfowl and raptors. Bring lunch and a beverage.

Trip Reports

Abbott's Lagoon, October 2. Six MDAS members and guests met at the Point Reyes National Seashore Bear Valley Visitor Center before continuing on to Abbott's Lagoon. The Bear Valley area produced plentiful California Quail, Western Bluebirds and Acorn Woodpeckers to start the morning. On the drive to Abbott's Lagoon we observed Savannah Sparrows, Killdeer, American Crow and Common Raven. We were pleasantly surprised to arrive near the coast with a clear and warm autumn day, something unusual as trips to Abbott's Lagoon go. White-crowned Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warblers, a Western Scrub-Jay and a Spotted Towhee greeted us in the parking area before we hit the trail. The target species we had hopes of seeing included the previously reported Chestnut-collared and Lapland Longspurs, and Red-throated Pipit; we found none. On the walk through the coastal scrub on the way to the lagoon and beach, we saw numerous White-crowned, Savannah and Song Sparrows, a few Black Phoebes, a seemingly out of place Red-shouldered Hawk this close to the ocean in treeless terrain, an American Kestrel, several Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures, and an Anna's Hummingbird. We had a sudden invasion of Western Meadowlarks coming in from the plowed fields. The inland lagoon had American Coots, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Double-crested Cormorant and a few duck species, American Wigeon being the most common. As we neared the coast, we found the American Bittern another birder had told us about. We were also told of the Snowy Plovers in the dunes, but we failed to find them. One Peregrine Falcon was seen. The outer lagoon harbored many gulls, including Ring-billed and Western, a large flock of Tree Swallows, some Brown Pelicans and a few Eared Grebes. On this lagoon's shoreline we studied a flock of at least 50 American Pipits without detecting any that appeared different. While watching the ocean from the waveslope, we saw Western and Clark's Grebes, Common Loons, a single but unidentifiable shearwater, a few Surf Scoters and a small flight of Sanderlings. We certainly expected more shorebirds and ocean birds, but considering the warm weather, perhaps they were migrating farther off the coast or have long since made their way south. The walk back to the parking area yielded a Say's Phoebe and a few Golden-crowned Sparrows. By day's end, the group tallied 60 species.

Gary Fregien

Hawk Hill, October 13. After several gray days, the MDAS trip to Rodeo Lagoon and Hawk Hill struck it lucky, with glorious sunshine all day. The morning birding at the lagoon was fairly slow, with no unusual migrants, though we did see herons, grebes, and egrets on the water, and Red-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow Warbler, and Townsend's Warbler as well as a cooperative Wrentit among other expected birds in the shrubbery. The hawk watch was one of the best ever, as we tallied White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Broad-winged Hawk, and two spectacular Ferruginous Hawks in addition to the more common species, that is, accipiters. Red-tailed Hawks, and Turkey Vultures were in abundance. Also worth mentioning: hundreds of Violet-Green Swallows, with an occasional swift mixed in. The views were spectacular and the birding was exciting. Totals: 4 birders, 39 species.

Fred Safier

Southeast Solano County Raptors, November 10. On this trip billed as a "raptor run", six birders observed a total of nine raptor

Continued on Page 6 »

Christmas Bird Count

It's time to mark your calendar and sign up for Mount Diablo Audubon's 2012 Christmas Bird Counts: Central County on Saturday, December 22, and East County on Tuesday, December 18. The species counts are high: Central County usually reports 150, and East County 140.

Invitations to both counts have been e-mailed to everyone who participated recently in either count and provided an e-mail address. Co-compilers Jimm Edgar and Maury Stern urge prompt replies. And if you're new to the count, you can e-mail ag70@value.net to request sign-up forms. All birders, no matter what their experience level, are welcome. You do not need to be a member of Mount Diablo Audubon, and participation is free.

This season marks the 113th year of Christmas Bird Counts. Until the end of the nineteenth century ornithologists, lacking even a first-edition *Peterson's Guide*, used shotguns instead. They compared skins of birds they shot with stuffed birds in their private collection or those in a museum tray. A popular way to add to their reference skins was to participate in a Christmas Day hunt, a competition to shoot as many birds as possible.

But in 1900, Frank Chapman, a naturalist and editor of *Bird Lore*, forerunner to *Audubon* magazine, organized the first "Christmas Bird Census." Each count attempts to identify and tally the birds within a 15-mile-diameter count circle during one calendar day. Now,

more than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day count of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest-running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends across the Americas. The National Audubon Society has made the results of all CBCs since 1900 accessible to everyone at www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action.

"We rely on our veteran CBC participants," says Jimm, "but we encourage newcomers. We'll do our best to assign you to an area that suits your interests and abilities, and, wherever you're assigned, you'll work with an experienced area leader."

If you live within one of the count circles, you can still help by spending a few hours looking for birds at your backyard feeders. You can search for birds from dawn to dusk—or longer if you look for owls. Perhaps you know of a Barn Owl that roosts in a palm tree in your neighborhood, or maybe a White-throated Sparrow frequents your yard. You can find maps of the count circles at http://www.diabloaudubon.com/newsletter/Quail_DecJan_1011.pdf.

Part of the fun is the camaraderie of dinner at day's end. Find out which group found the bird of the day, learn what species were missed, check out where rare birds were seen, relish the day's field experiences.

Looking for a Gift?

Are you thinking about finding a gift for a birder this Christmas or for another occasion? Consider *A Bird Black As the Sun: California Poets on Crows & Ravens*, a collection of poems, newly released and available at local book stores and on-line.



In this diverse anthology, edited by Enid Osborn and Cynthia Anderson, over 80 of the Golden State's finest poets hold forth on the theme of crows and ravens—offering passionate, vivid, sometimes humorous, and ever-surprising views of these common yet mysterious birds, called "black as the sun" by Gary Snyder.

Contributors include two Poet Laureates of the United States and other iconic poets such as Christopher Buckley, William Everson (Brother Antoninus), Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Ann Stanford.

Trip Reports

» *Continued from Page 5*

species, on a clear and cool autumn morning. Red-tailed Hawk was by far the most common raptor; seeing dozens. We also saw at least four Ferruginous Hawks, a few Northern Harriers, numerous American Kestrels and one each Red-shouldered Hawk, Osprey, Merlin, Prairie Falcon and Burrowing Owl. Other notable species include flocks of Long-billed Curlews, numerous Loggerhead



Mute Swan

Shrikes, a flock of two dozen Tundra Swans and a couple of Mute Swans, Tricolored Blackbirds, large flocks of both House Finch and American Goldfinch, several Black and Say's Phoebes, a Common Yellowthroat and the four corvids common to the valley. Certainly the biggest surprise came near the end of the day when a Chukar was seen walking alongside and into the roadway just south of Bird's Landing. Of course, this bird is not countable as a wild bird in the valley due to its highly likely status as an escapee, especially considering the close proximity of a hunting club and game farm. So, without the Chukar, the group tallied 57 species on the day.

Gary Fregien

Mountain View Sanitary District, November 13. Eighteen birders attended the outing. There were no unusual birds observed but some of those spotted included an Osprey which circled the group several times and appeared to be looking for a meal. It was a great view of an Osprey. Other birds cited included Cinnamon Teal, Pied-billed Grebes, White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorant, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Great Blue Heron, Red Tailed Hawk, Lesser Goldfinch, Eurasian-collared Dove, Northern Mockingbird, Great-tailed Grackle, plus several others.

Steve Taylor

Observations By Maury Stern

Submit Contra Costa County sightings to mbstern2@yahoo.com or (925) 284-5980 or send to EBB Sightings@yahoo.com. If you report sightings to eBird, please also send to Maury Stern.

The past month has seen a minor irruption of Pine Siskins and the continued presence of out-of-place Red-breasted Nuthatches due to failure of the seed crop in more northern conifers.

Brant have been seen at Miller-Knox RP from 10/21 to 11/4. JH, BM, LL.

AL saw two **Mute Swans** at Mallard Reservoir on 11/10. Steve Glover comments: "[Mute Swans] have been present in that area since at least as far back as the mid-1990s. The birds are usually present out on the Naval Weapons Station and thus not visible from any public roads, but on some CBCs (the only time we had access to the reservoir without looking through the fence) a few would be on the actual reservoir."

Wood Ducks were at Briones Reservoir 10/27, RS, and Heather Farm pond, FS 10/31, as well as in Las Trampas Creek in Lafayette behind his house over the course of the month, MS. DW saw a pair at Upper San Leandro Reservoir 11/8.

Two male **Redheads** were at Lafayette Reservoir on 10/30, BG. Last year there were very few Redheads seen in the Bay Area.

DW saw 56 **Common Mergansers** at Upper San Leandro Reservoir 11/8.

AL saw a **Ring-necked Pheasant** 10/10 in Richmond at Wildcat Marsh and Landfill Loop Trail.

California Quail were at EL's backyard for the first time in 18 years 10/27.

PS saw an **American Bittern** 11/2 at Contra Loma RP in Antioch.

There were two **Bald Eagles** at Los Vaqueros Reservoir 10/29. AL.

Golden Eagles were seen in San Ramon 10/9, ST; East County 10/29, AL; 11/3 at Fernandez Ranch, MH; and Briones RP 11/4, JB; three on 11/8 at Upper San Leandro Reservoir, DW,

AL saw a **Merlin** at Newhall Community Park in Concord 11/8; DW at Upper

San Leandro Reservoir 11/8; and PS at Contra Loma in Antioch on 11/10.

A **Prairie Falcon** was at Los Vaqueros Reservoir 10/29, AL.

A **Black Rail** was heard and a **Virginia Rail** seen at Martinez Regional Shoreline 10/29, PB.

There were two **Snowy Plovers** and one **Ruddy Turnstone** at the foot of Canal Street near Richmond Harbor 10/21, BM.

JS saw two **Pectoral Sandpipers** at the Richmond Water Treatment Plant 10/18.

A **Northern Pygmy-Owl** was heard near his home in northern Lafayette 10/24, JA.

On 10/10, AL saw a **Burrowing Owl** at the Wildcat Marsh in Richmond.

AL saw a **Short-eared Owl** 10/24 at Bay Point Regional Shoreline.

A selasphorus hummingbird paid a brief visit to his back yard in Lafayette 10/13. MS.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were seen in Miller-Knox Park 10/21, JH; and in their Antioch yard 11/2, P&NS.

A **Rock Wren** was at Ferry Point in Point Richmond from 10/23 to 11/4. TB, KE, JD, TB. On 10/29, AL saw seven at Los Vaqueros Reservoir.

Cedar Waxwings were in a large flock at Tilden RP on 10/23. AKA, JW.

A **Phainopepla** was on the north side of Mount Diablo 10/15. JCh.

RS saw a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** at Briones Reservoir 10/27.

BM saw a **Palm Warbler** 10/21 near the Richmond Parkway and Parr.

A **Western Tanager** was in the bird bath of her Alamo home 10/15, JR, and in the bird bath of his Lafayette home 10/24, JA.

There was a **Rufous-crowned Sparrow** near the bridge at Upper San Leandro Reservoir 11/8. DW.

Two late **Grasshopper Sparrows** were near Black Diamond Mines Trail in Clayton 11/10. JB.

AKa and JW saw **Fox Sparrows** singing at Tilden RP on 10/23.

White-throated Sparrows have returned. 10/19 and 11/10 at Contra Loma, PS; JC at Moraga home 10/31; AL at Newhall Community Park 11/8.

JR had a **Slate-colored Junco** in her Alamo yard 10/30.

Tricolored Blackbirds were in a flock of 20 at Miller-Knox Park 10/21. JH.

P&NS saw a **Great-tailed Grackle** at the Antioch Marina 10/21.

Pine Siskins were widespread in small numbers. AK 10/10 in Richmond—15; P&NS; 10/15 in Antioch—8; JR 10/13 in Alamo—4 for 2 weeks; BH 11/1 in Concord—1; CH 11/2 in Martinez—1.

JA Jeff Acuff, JB John Blakelock, TB Tony Brake, PB Paul Brenner, JBr Jerry Britten, JCh Jim Chiropoulos, JC Judi Cooper, JD Jay Dodge, KF Kathy Francone, BG Bingham Gibbs, CH Carol Haglund, MH Mike Hall, JH Jack Hayden, BH Bob Hislop, AKA Alan Kaplan, AK Alan Krakauer, EL Eugenia Larson, AL Albert Linkowski, LL Laura Look, BM Bruce Mast, JR Jean Richmond, FS Fred Safier, P&NS Paul and Nancy Schorr, JS John Sterling, MS Maury Stern, ST Steve Taylor, DW Denise Wight, JW James Wilson,

14th Annual Snow Goose Festival of the Pacific Flyway, Chico, Thursday-Sunday, January 24-27. www.snowgoosefestival.org. Sacramento Refuges, Sutter Buttes.

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, January 18-21. Join Morro Coast Audubon Society for its 17th Annual Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival. Located on California's scenic Central Coast, Morro Bay is an important stop on the Pacific Flyway and one of the country's preeminent birding spots. The area is recognized worldwide for its diversity of both resident and wintering birds, and at last year's festival, over 200 species of birds were identified! To register and for more information about the Festival, visit www.morrobaybirdfestival.org. Registration ends January 6.

San Diego Bird Festival, February 28-March 3. The 17th annual festival takes wing on scenic Mission Bay with keynoter Dr. John Fitzpatrick, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and special guest Bill Thompson III. Festival HQ is steps from San Diego's famous "Mile of Birds" river estuary. Events include field trips, pelagic trips, workshops, Birding & Optics Expo, a Big Sit, and Family Free Day, plus a post-festival Baja endemics trip. San Diego Audubon Society, www.sandiegoaudubon.org.

John Cassin _____ » *Continued from Page 10*

In all, Cassin described nearly 200 new bird species from around the world, nearly all from the Academy collection. He discovered and named Brewer's Sparrow from a specimen he chanced across while studying the Academy's collection of Clay-colored Sparrows. He first described Heermann's Gull and Wrentit, both of which had been collected in California by William Gambel, and named Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Acorn Woodpecker, California (Brown) Towhee, Ross's Goose, Williamson's Sapsucker, White-headed Woodpecker, Kauai Oo, Hutton's Vireo, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Sage Sparrow, and Black-throated Sparrow.

At the Smithsonian, Spencer Baird gathered new specimens from all the military and railroad explorations of the U.S. West and Mexico. Most he then sent directly to Cassin to examine and describe. John Xántus was a Hungarian exiled from his country who became an American citizen by joining the army. He was with one of the military expeditions as a nurse to surgeon William Hammond, who was one of Baird's correspondents. Xántus was later transferred to Fort Tejon, and while there he collected the first Cassin's Vireo. Xántus also described the flycatcher he named for Hammond.

Cassin wrote several of the government scientific reports based on explorations of the western U. S. and military records from the Mexican War. He wrote many publications and articles on birds from his study of the Academy's world-wide collection. However, his plans to issue a series of books on western birds failed due to



Cassin's Auklet offshore near Fort Bragg. Photo courtesy of Ron LeValley.

lack of subscriptions and the interruption of the Civil War. During the Civil War Cassin joined the Union Army, then served time in a military prison after being captured by the Confederates. One volume containing fifty illustrations and descriptions of western and Mexican birds did get published "as a supplement to *Audubon's Birds of America*." It is ironic that Cassin had little respect for Audubon, feeling that Audubon "is no naturalist."

As was Townsend's, Cassin's life was shortened by his love of birds. It is certain he knowingly suffered two decades of arsenic poisoning to further his knowledge. Arsenic in the mixture used to preserve the bird skins he would not stop handling led to his early death at the age of 55.

Pine Siskin ♦ *Carduelis pinus*

a

Some beginning birders may have difficulty distinguishing Pine Siskins from female House Finches, but the slightly smaller size, the slender, sharply pointed bill, and the yellow edging of wing feathers are key differences.

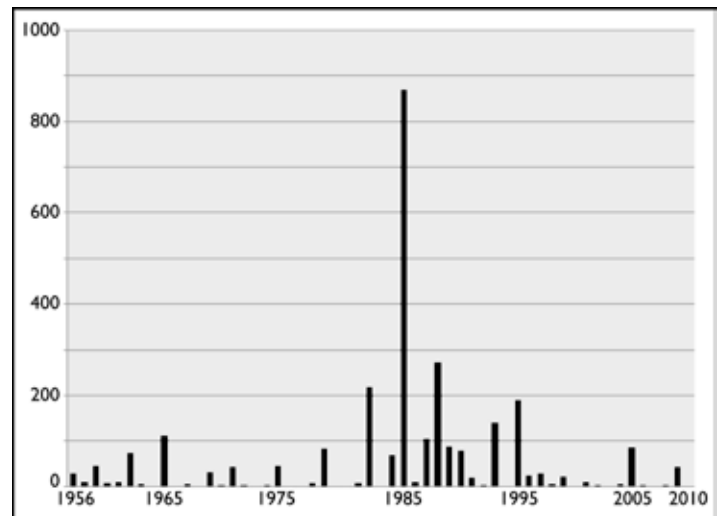
Pine Siskins.



Pine Siskins are among a group of seed-eating birds of northern latitudes that demonstrate southward migrations in autumn called irruptions. Others include Cedar Waxwings, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch, and Red Crossbills. Scientists agree that recurrent large-scale irruptions are caused by failure of cone crops. A year of poor crops often follows a year of good crops. In such a season there may be a larger population of birds, and pressure is put on food sources, prompting a motivation for migration.

Similarly, raptors that feed on small mammals will have an impetus to migrate south when such prey as hares and rabbits decline owing to scarcity of grain in boreal regions or to unusually harsh weather. Snowy Owls are well known for periodic journeys even to as far south as the Bay Area. Rough-legged Hawks and Northern Goshawks, Short-eared and Great Horned Owls also may follow these cycles of good years and bad.

The chart shows the number of Pine Siskins reported on the Central Costa County Christmas Count for each year since 1956, the first year Mount Diablo Audubon held a count. (No Pine Siskins were reported during the 2010 and 2011 counts.) Note the high of 868 birds counted in 1985.)



What Backyard Birds Need in Winter

By Mike Eliot

There is much we can do to help our backyard birds survive the cold and rainy weather ahead. Here are three ideas:

Food ► For winter, birds will change the kinds of foods they eat. Instead of insects and fruits (which are harder to find), birds eat more seeds and nuts. Often, the food birds eat in the day help build up fat reserves that are used through the night to keep warm.



Offer high energy foods such as suet, Bark Butter, bird food cylinders and blends with nuts to help birds maintain their high metabolic rate and stay warm.

Finches and Pine Siskins will also eat lots of thistle, which needs to be kept fresh in your feeders. Any thistle left in feeders for more than two weeks will probably be dry and rancid.

Feeder Location ► During harsh weather, birds favor feeders protected from the weather. Place your feeders near cover, such as evergreen bushes or trees, densely branched shrubs, brush piles or hollow logs, so birds can duck into it to get out of weather or escape from predators. You can even create a lower wind break to help your ground-feeding birds.

Water ► Birds need water to maintain their metabolism and their feathers for effective insulation. Besides helping birds properly digest food, water helps birds keep their feathers clean and in top condition. Research has shown that a chickadee with well-maintained feathers can sustain a 70°F (21°C) layer of insulation between the outside air and its skin.

Continue to fill and regularly clean your bird bath(s) throughout the winter months. Your birds will thank you for it and you will see more birds in your yard.

Mount Diablo Audubon Society

Mount Diablo Audubon Society, a Chapter of National Audubon, is committed to the sustainable balance of our community's people, birds, other wildlife, and habitat through conservation, education, and advocacy.

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Mount Diablo Audubon Society meets at 7:00 PM on the first Thursday of each month, except July and August, in the Camellia Room of The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Drive, Walnut Creek. Everyone is invited.

Mount Diablo Audubon Society thanks our Business Partners for their generous support:

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Cassin's Finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*).
Photo by Beth Branthaver.

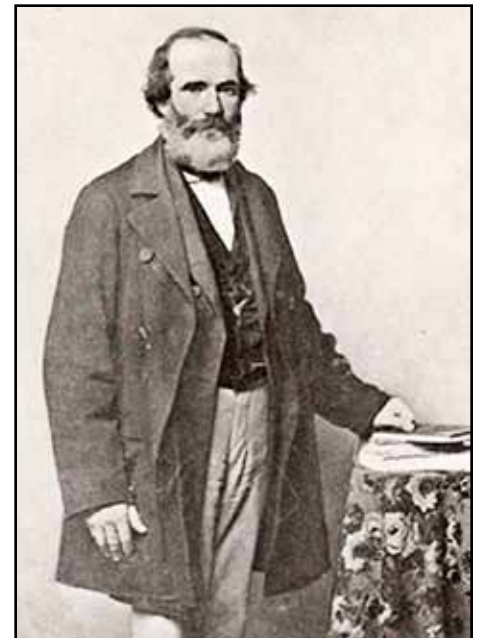
John Cassin America's First Taxonomist

• A small plain sparrow that inhabits Texas and New Mexico and whose territorial skylarking flights are dramatic. • A common small bird of the western forests, known for its constant singing. • A small, dark seabird of Pacific shores from Alaska to Mexico. • A large, noisy flycatcher of southwestern United States and Mexico. • A finch of the western mountains. These five species of western America were named for John Cassin, although it is almost certain that Cassin never saw any of these birds living in its natural habitat.

• Cassin's Sparrow was named by Samuel Woodhouse from a specimen he collected near San Antonio during the 1851 US Army Corps of Engineers expedition from Texas to San Diego. • Cassin's Vireo was named by John Xántus. • Cassin's Auklet was described and named by William Gambel. • Cassin's Kingbird was named by George Lawrence—Lawrence's Goldfinch was named by Cassin; • Cassin's Finch was named by Spencer Baird.

John Cassin was another of the early naturalists that made Philadelphia and the Academy of Natural Sciences preeminent. Born in 1813 to a Quaker family, his interest in natural science was, well, natural. He excelled in science studies at the Quaker boarding school in Westtown, Pennsylvania, where Thomas Say and John Townsend also studied. One of Cassin's botany school-books contains notes showing that he was finding plant species not listed in the book and making his own descriptions.

He was made honorary curator of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences in 1842. Despite the "honorary" in the title he spent endless hours with the academy collections. Cassin's science interests and knowledge was broad. There are insect species named for him as well as the five birds. The Academy bought bird skins from around the world, and soon Cassin was the most informed U.S. ornithologist of his era and the first serious taxonomist.



Though he was a talented field observer, Cassin personally collected just one bird previously unknown. In September, 1842, he shot a new vireo near Philadelphia and named it the Philadelphia Vireo. It is curious that the bird only passes through its namesake city during migration.

Continued on Page 8 »